



Briefing Note

COMPATIBILITY AND INTERMIXING OF GREASES

What is grease incompatibility? The National Lubricating Grease Institute (NLGI) definition states that two greases show incompatibility when a mixture of the products shows physical properties or service performance which are markedly inferior to those of either of the greases before mixing. Performance or properties inferior to one of the products and superior to the other may be due to simple mixing and would not be considered as evidence of incompatibility; this is sometimes referred to as “performance dilution”.

In general, mixing of greases made with different thickener types should be avoided; thus Microgel® or clay thickened greases should not be mixed with soap thickened (e.g. lithium complex) greases as this can lead to breakdown of the thickener structure. Incompatibility between greases can also arise from additive interactions. In some cases, different greases approved to the same specification may be incompatible with each other; to account for this, the MIL-PRF-23827C specification has recently been amended to divide approved greases into Type I (soap-based) and Type II (clay-based).

GREASE SUBSTITUTION

Airframe and grease manufacturers do not recommend intermixing different types or brand names of grease, even if they are considered optional to each other, because of possible incompatibility.

When changing over from one type or brand name grease to another, the recommended practice is to remove all of the old grease from the bearing surfaces and internal cavities of the lubricated mechanism prior to application of the new grease. If this is not possible or practicable, then the “purging” technique should be employed.

Generally, “**purging**” is defined as “the process of injecting grease into the grease fitting until the old grease has been visibly exhausted from the mechanism and only the new grease is coming out.” It is advisable to seek information from the aircraft manufacturers and their maintenance manuals for their recommendations regarding purging procedures.

Note: The definition of purging is not specific to the substitution of greases and applies equally to routine re-greasing with the same grease where the object in this case is to expel contaminants such as wear debris, dust, dirt and water which may have accumulated in the grease during service. That is, purging should always be done where the design of the lubricated component is amenable to this purging process.

Always consult the Aircraft Maintenance Manual, Maintenance Planning Document or Component Overhaul Manual, and any associated Service Bulletins for advice on the correct grade of grease to be used in a particular mechanism and on the method of application and/or replacement of that grease. In particular, the latest issues of the following publications should be consulted for the most up-to-date advice:

- Boeing Service Letter 707-SL-20-012-C/727-SL-20-022C/737-SL-20-027-C/747-SL-20-044-C/757-SL-20-022-C/767-SL-20-022-C/777-SL-20-006-C “Summary of Most Commonly Used Greases on Boeing Airplanes”
- Airbus Service Information Letter SIL 12-008 “General Purpose Aviation Greases Functional Interchangeability”

- FAA Flight Standards Information Bulletin for Airworthiness FSAW 02-02C “The Potential Adverse Effects of Grease Substitution”

After changing from one type or brand of grease to another, operators may choose to shorten the re-greasing interval by 50% for the following period and then revert to the normal re-greasing interval specified in the Aircraft Maintenance Manual. This will help to ensure that the new type or brand of grease has fully replaced the old.

It is not good practice to randomly or intermittently alternate between grease types or brands, even though they may be approved to the same grease specification. Grease manufacturers carefully balance the components in their greases for optimum performance. Therefore even if two different greases are not incompatible, it is unlikely that all mixtures of the two greases will maintain the same optimal performance as the individual greases (“performance dilution”). Once an action has been taken to change grease types or brands, then the chosen grease should always be used for subsequent re-greasing.

Wherever possible, use of a grease gun or grease in cartridges is recommended. If grease is used directly from tins or pails, it is important that wooden scrapers are not employed and that the tin lid is replaced firmly immediately the grease has been removed in order to prevent contamination by airborne dust, dirt and atmospheric moisture.

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